



Section 5: Courts as Educators – Model Public Education Programs



One of the major causes identified for the public's waning trust and confidence in the justice system is the fact that the public knows and understands little about the role and operations of the justice system. That limited knowledge and understanding can be attributed in part to several factors.

The public education system in California, once relied on for strong education in civics and government, has changed over the last two decades in the degree and timing with which it provides civics education. Many public school students in California receive only basic civics instruction in their K–3 years. They do not receive enough information to truly understand their own government and court system until late in their high school years. Also a large number of first-generation immigrants to California come from countries and traditions in which the justice system has not operated as an independent branch of government and has not maintained the impartiality required of justice in the United States.

Although the State Board of Education has authorized new academic standards that would enhance civics education, the courts can no longer rely solely on others to address the public's lack of knowledge and understanding of the justice system. To increase that knowledge and understanding, the courts can and should be involved in public education programs. Such programs can take many different shapes and contain different content. But they all seek to achieve the same objective, a knowledgeable and informed public that understands the role and operation of the courts and supports the independence of the judicial branch of government.

This section of the handbook provides information on different types of public education programs that have been used effectively in California and throughout the United States.

- A. Working with Youth and Schools
- B. Juror Education/Appreciation
- C. Speakers Bureaus
- D. Courthouse Tours
- E. Public Information Materials

These model programs offer ideas about ways in which the courts can become actively involved in community outreach through public education programs in their communities.

